



### Solving the solar conundrum...

**Vastern Timber** is the UK's largest and most established hardwood sawmill and has been manufacturing British Timber Products, all from locally grown timber, for over 100 years.

When they developed their new hardwood cladding product called Brimstone, they installed specialist equipment that heats the wood to 210C and so, in seeking to deliver more sustainable products, the specialist processing equipment was incompatible with the voltages from their solar panels, leading to a conundrum as to how to solve the problem.

Colin Partridge spoke with **Tom Barnes, MD of Vastern Timber** on his decision to install Watford Control equipment.

### **Describe your decision to install solar panels + your goals for this?**

The original reason for installing solar was to make up the shortfall in supply from the grid, along with the desire to decarbonise our production processes.

Subsequently, we have been allowed to increase our grid supply and so the benefits are now decarbonisation and a reduction in energy costs over the long term.

**When did you notice the issue of high voltages?**

This issue was not flagged by the solar company during the scoping phase of the project. The problem only became apparent after the panels had been fitted and commissioned. Because our equipment is manufactured in Europe, it is rated at 400V rather than 415V. After commissioning we realised that the inverter for the panels was adding 10V onto the grid levels which invariably created a voltage level that was too high for the equipment. At this point we realised that the panels combined with UK grid were not compatible with our equipment.

**How did this impact your operations and equipment?**

This meant that we either ran our equipment or the solar, but not at the same time.

**How did you go about seeking a solution?**

I consulted a number of companies that seemed to be experts in voltage regulation. Watford Control was one.

**Are you satisfied with the solution provided?**

I am always suspicious of 'plug and play' promises, however, the voltage stabiliser has done exactly as described and it has solved our issue. I am very satisfied and pleasantly surprised that the equipment was very easy to install and worked perfectly from day one.

**What advice would you give to other businesses facing this issue?**

Speak to Watford Control, good communication and good equipment.

**Do you have any future plans to expand your renewable energy initiatives?**

We may need another stabiliser for another part of our factory. We may also install more panels after we have monitored the original payback.